

Chapter 6

The Battle of Nacogdoches

The Anahuac Disturbance and the Battle of Velasco directly precipitated the Battle of Nacogdoches, in which I happened to play a small part. Here is how my involvement in the affair came about.

In early July, I was paid a visit by a young man named *Isaac Watts Burton*, who had arrived in Tejas from Georgia just six months earlier and now made his home in Nacogdoches. He had come to Béxar in hopes of obtaining an audience with Colonel Bowie. At Palacio Veramendi, however, he was informed that the colonel was out of town and could not easily be reached. Úrsula would not tell him where her husband was, but suggested that, if Burton's business with him was truly urgent, a message might possibly be delivered by me. Úrsula's brother, whom I had met but once, guided the man to the inn, where I was working in the tavern, and filled me in on the situation. Then, he took his leave, and I sat down with Burton to hear what he had to say.

Isaac Burton was taller than just about any other man of my acquaintance. He was modestly attractive, but not gorgeous by any means. What I liked most about him was the fact that he projected an air of competence. I did not immediately fall in love with him, as was my wont. But it would not require much of an effort on his part to seduce me if he chose to do so. He did.

It was not until the following morning over coffee and tortillas that I learned the reason for Burton's desire to communicate with Colonel Bowie. Even after having made love with him, I was still addressing him as *Mr Burton*.

"Don't you think you could call me *Isaac*?" he asked.

"Perhaps in private, I might." Then, I very tentatively tried out his given name. It felt delicious on my tongue.

He smiled with genuine pleasure. "Thank you, Manuela. Now to business. Jim Bowie will want to know what I have to tell him. I can promise you that."

“Nevertheless, if Úrsula is unwilling to tell you how to find him, then neither shall I. But if it truly is important, then I can carry a message to him for you.”

He asked for a pen and ink and paper, and when I brought them, he wrote out a two page letter and sealed it with wax. I did not ask the contents of the letter, but he told me anyway.

“There is soon to unfold an important event at Nacogdoches. How it might play out is anyone’s guess. Colonel José de las Piedras, commander of the Mexican Twelfth Permanent Battalion there, has ordered all Texians in his district to surrender their arms. Obviously, we are not going to do that. Instead, we shall demand that he declare for Santa Anna and the Constitution of 1824. Our hope is that he will elect to embrace us as comrades in arms and join us in the struggle against the centralist regime. If he’s a hardliner, there will be a fight. Either way, Colonel Bowie will want to be a part of this.”

Isaac was right, I knew. Colonel Bowie would indeed wish to take part in whatever was to occur. He was ever eager to add glory to his name. “I’ll leave immediately. But it will be a month before Colonel Bowie can be in Nacogdoches.”

“Do your best. That’s all I can ask.”

I went up then and changed into my wilderness attire. When I came back down, Isaac had already saddled my horse for me. Before mounting, I kissed him goodbye. I still was not in love with him, but I certainly did like him a lot, and I was gratified beyond measure for the intense pleasure he had given me the night before.

“That’s the first time I ever kissed a boy,” he teased. “It’s a lot nicer than I might have expected.”

I couldn’t help giggling at his silly joke. “Your secret’s safe with me as long as you don’t kiss any other boys.”

I knew, of course, that Colonel Bowie was in Natchez, Mississippi, on business, but I did not know how to locate him there. And so, on my way out of town, I stopped at Palacio Veramendi to ask Úrsula, who told me the name of the hotel at which her husband always stayed whenever he was in Natchez.

I had never been outside of México before. The prospect of traveling in a foreign country made me slightly nervous. Or perhaps it was just excitement that put butterflies in my stomach. In any case, I arrived at Natchez without incident, found Colonel Bowie, and handed him the letter, which he promptly tore open and read.

“Do you know what this says?” he asked me.

“Mr Burton told me there are to be important goings-on in Nacogdoches, maybe even a battle. If you’re headed there, and I assume that you are, then I think I’ll string along. Would that be alright with you?”

“I can think of no one else whose company I’d enjoy even half as much.”

We pushed our horses to the limit of their endurance, traveling from first light each day until well after dark. The first of August found us approaching our destination. At Pine Hill just outside the township of Nacogdoches, we came late in the day upon a huge encampment of Texian volunteers—at least three hundred in number—representing Ayish Bayou, Tenaha, San Felipe de Austin, Neches, San Augustine, Shelby, Attoyac Bayou, and the Sabine Settlement. Much to Colonel Bowie’s disappointment, a commander of this militia force had already been elected: one James W Bullock. Colonel Bowie felt that, had we arrived a day earlier, he himself would have been a more-logical choice to lead this company. Very probably he was right. He certainly would have had my vote.